

MEMORANDUM

NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

[ETS-HK 10224]

INFORMATION

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June 14, 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

MR. KISSINGER

FROM:

RICHARD T. KENNEDY

JOHN H. HOLDRIDGE

SUBJECT:

CIA Assessment of NVA Military Capability

The following summarizes the CIA study (Tab A) which you requested.

The CIA study addresses itself specifically to the two issues you raised: (1) the capability of the Communists to continue their offensive in South Vietnam during the next one or two months, and (2) the impact on Hanoi's capabilities -- both in the short and long term -- of the U.S. interdiction effort in North Vietnam.

The summary and conclusions of the study produce no surprising statements to alter previous estimates, nor does it suggest courses of action much different than those we have been following.

We do, however, feel that this paper does raise some important questions which should be examined further. These questions are included in the last paragraph of this memorandum. We are also attaching (Tab B) a letter we recommend you send to Mr. Helms asking that CIA address these questions.

ARMY, NSA, NSS
reviews completed.

SHORT-TERM CAPABILITY OF THE DRV

In spite of all constraints, losses, and problems affecting the enemy -- the paper concludes that DRV has the ability to prosecute its offensive in the South for the next two to three months at very high levels of activity in MR-1 and at substantial levels in other areas. Heavy rains will, of course, complicate the flow of supplies, except in MR-1. The enemy's artillery regiments are taking a heavy pounding, and his armored forces have been seriously depleted. These programs will reduce the enemy's offensive punch, but the evidence is fairly clear that they will not deter him from undertaking new offensive operations in the near future.

~~TOP SECRET~~

TOP SECRET

- 2 -

- MR-1. With roads extending through the DMZ, a petroleum pipeline system into the DMZ, and large ordnance stockpiles, the Communists are capable of supporting major operations in MR-1 throughout the summer.
- MR-2. In spite of some food distribution problems and the difficulty of moving supplies to forward positions in a timely manner, substantial supply deliveries this past dry season probably give the enemy an adequate reserve.
- MR-3 and 4. Here manpower will be more of a limiting factor than supplies. With substantial supplies on hand added to what can be moved by road and waterways this summer, the Communists can initiate substantial offensive operations over the next few months. They may, however, have problems in moving supplies to interior regions.

Since the end of March this year the North Vietnamese have expended arms, ammunition, and other military equipment at rates which at times have exceeded even the high levels of the 1968 Tet offensive. However, the Communists currently are faced with no critical shortages of manpower or supplies needed for the fight in South Vietnam.

Personnel. Thus far, Hanoi has dispatched at least 120,000 men to the Southern war zones during the current infiltration cycle (1 September 1971 through early June 1972). We cannot estimate the number of infiltrators who have come across the DMZ outside of organized units. Data is soft, but "best judgments" on men lost (killed or seriously wounded) are:

- MR-1. 20,000 NVN troops estimated lost this year. Infiltration is probably not enough to make up all losses, so some erosion in combat personnel has occurred.
- MR-2. 10,000 estimated lost. About 5,000 replacements have arrived, leaving a net reduction of about 5,000 men.
- MR-3. 10,000 estimated lost. It is likely that the Communists have had sufficient numbers of infiltrators on hand to replace losses thus far, but they may now be reaching the limit of replacement capability.
- MR-4. 3,000 estimated lost, which is far smaller than the enemy's replacement capability.

Many seasoned officers and cadre have been killed during this offensive, and it will be difficult to integrate green troops into combat units.

TOP SECRET

Logistics. Since the start of the enemy's current military offensive, the Communist logistic commands in the DMZ area, the Laotian Panhandle, and Cambodia have been engaged in a major and continuing effort to move large quantities of supplies to the battle areas. Heavy rains during the latter part of May have forced a reduction of logistic activity. However, the enemy apparently intends to continue vehicle activity for as long as possible.

- MR-1. The Communists are logistically capable of supporting major operations in MR-1 throughout the summer because of the proximity to major supply lines in Laos and the DMZ. A petroleum pipeline extends into the DMZ. The Communists have ready access to foodstocks in northern South Vietnam as a result of successes at Quantri.
- MR-2. COMINT reflected heavy shipments of ordnance into this area this spring, substantially more than has yet appeared in combat. Concurrently, the enemy transported large volumes of foodstuff from Cambodia and the coastal lowlands of north South Vietnam. An estimated 270 tons per month in weapons, ammunition, and equipment are needed to sustain offensive operations, considerably below average monthly deliveries from southern Laos.
- MR 3 and 4. The massive expenditure of mortar, rocket, and artillery ammunition against An Loc provides evidence of large supply stores on hand in support of border province operations. Communist forces need about 600 tons monthly in weapons, ammunition, and equipment to prosecute the war in MRs 3 and 4 and to support present operations in Cambodia. 6,500 to 8,400 tons of supplies were moved to combat areas during the dry season. There will be problems, however, associated with moving supplies to the interior regions, such as the lower delta region.

LONG-TERM PROSPECTS

Regarding the longer-term prospects of Hanoi being able to meet the continued military requirements for the type of war it is now fighting, evidence must be accumulated for another month or two on what is happening in the North Vietnamese land transport network before CIA can make a judgment concerning the ability of the NVN to overcome its supply problems. The role the USSR and PRC will play in this regard is far from clear. There is no evidence that the current mining and bombing program has yet impinged directly on frontline capabilities in the short term. Whether it will depends on such factors as the NVN ability to circumvent the interdiction program and the willingness and capability of its allies to provide supplies in sufficient quantity to offset bombing losses.

TOP SECRET

- 4 -

In the 1965-68 period of heavy bombing, the principal NVN port of Haiphong remained open and North Vietnam was fighting a type of war in South Vietnam that required less equipment and significantly less petroleum. In that earlier period, North Vietnam also had access to substantial amounts of Chinese labor, which contributed greatly to the effort to keep overland routes open. It will clearly be much more difficult than it was in the 1965-68 period for Hanoi to meet, over the long term, the continued military requirements for the kind of war it is now fighting.

There are indications that some supplies are continuing to move into North Vietnam on overland routes from the PRC. It is impossible to determine either the composition or the volume of these overland movements, but there is evidence that at least a part of them are the essentials of war -- ordnance and petroleum. Total imports into North Vietnam last year were on the order of 2.5 million tons, about 90% of which came in by sea. This total -- a daily average of 6,800 tons -- would place a great burden on North Vietnam's transport system were Hanoi to attempt (and its Communist allies agree) to bring in this volume of imports largely by overland routes.

Hanoi could introduce a rigorous program of austerity in its civilian consumption. If, for example, during the next 12 months about 1 million tons -- down from 2.5 million in 1971 -- are imported into North Vietnam, Hanoi, this memorandum judges, could continue a high level of combat in the South and meet essential civilian needs at home. (No additional fertilizer is needed in 1972. The next harvest will provide adequate food into the first months of 1973.)

Petroleum is probably the most important commodity in Hanoi's logistical equation and Hanoi must make efforts to keep imports up. As of 8 June, NVN petroleum stocks for all purposes were sufficient for about 10 weeks, and with strict austerity in the civilian section, maybe several weeks longer. Over the past four years NVN has used about 400,000 tons annually. (Although the North Vietnamese imported 150,000 in the first quarter of 1972.) There are indications of some overland POL replenishments, but it is doubtful if major replenishment has been accomplished. There is nothing as yet to indicate that petroleum in quantity is being moved into North Vietnam overland. Both the USSR and PRC have sufficient POL for NVN needs and there is no insurmountable logistics burden in moving POL through China to the North Vietnamese border. A pipeline, from Hai Duong, east of Hanoi, is being constructed toward China, but there is no hard evidence of how -- or to what extent -- Hanoi allies intend to meet NVN POL needs

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

or how successful Hanoi will be in moving POL from the Chinese border. Bombing has reduced POL storage by 42,000 tons or 17% since 31 March, 31,000 tons of this loss at the two principal storage terminals at Haiphong and Hanoi. There are 220 small tank sites dispersed throughout NVN and camouflaged so as to make them difficult bombing targets.

Small tank capacity is estimated to have been reduced from 90,000 tons on 31 March 1972 to about 84,000 tons on 2 June. Storage capacity of 55-gallon drums and other small containers represented about 85,000 tons on 31 March, and not more than about 5,000 tons of this capacity (equivalent to about 30,000 55-gallon drums) have been destroyed.

Bombing effects on the transportation system:

- Railroads. Operations have been significantly disrupted on the railroads, particularly the roads from Hanoi to Dong Dang and to Lao Cai, both on the Chinese border. Through service on these roads has been restricted. The Hanoi-Haiphong line is currently interdicted.

Bombing has effectively stopped, at least for the time being, the through movement of trains in the Panhandle on the Hanoi-Vinh line. The Hanoi-Thai Nguyen and the Kep-Thai Nguyen lines have not been attacked. Since late May, there has been an increasing number of repairs and bypass construction at key targets. What is not known is the extent to which the NVN can quickly repair bomb damage to keep the railroads in operation and replace rolling stock.

- Highways: In the northern half of NVN there is no visible shift from railroad to alternative truck traffic. This road traffic is difficult to interdict because of its redundancy and the myriad bypass options open to the enemy.
- Waterways: There are indications that the waterways may have been cleared of mines -- it is not clear how -- and that some river traffic and transshipping are taking place.

The most immediate result of bombing on the economy would appear to be a cutback in non-essential construction activity. Beyond this and the confirmed physical damage, there are no hard signs of economic dislocation caused by the interdiction effort.

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

- 6 -

Comment

In sum the study concludes that the NVA can continue a high level of combat in the South for several months, certainly in MR 1 and with increasing difficulty because of the effects of weather or resupply in MRs 2, 3, and 4. It also concludes that major dislocation has not yet occurred in the North because the effects of the mining and rail interdiction have not yet cut deeply into reserves already in place.

The study leaves unanswered some fundamental questions affecting both the short term and longer term NVN prospects. In the longer term it correctly notes that development of the NVN logistics situation will depend almost entirely on decisions to be taken by USSR and the PRC (most notably the latter). Nevertheless we believe a harder examination of data which is available or can be deduced would be revealing and should be made.

As to short term prospects we believe a harder look should be taken at the constraints affecting the NVA units in the battle area.

-- We do not believe, for example, that the study has adequately taken into account the denigration of combat effectiveness of the NVA main force units in the South by the heavy losses which they have sustained (the losses attributed to those units by the study are estimated quite conservatively in our view). While it is quite likely that needed numbers of personnel may be available as replacements, the real question is their quality -- experienced personnel have been lost and must be replaced, particularly in NCO and Junior Officer levels by inexperienced personnel.

-- The study suggests that supplies are available in the South, having been moved there during the intensive logistics drives of last fall and winter and this spring. While this is probably true, the real question is can the NVA get the supplies distributed from the caches to the units engaged -- equipment and personnel losses, continued tactical air coverage, and weather will dramatically affect their ability to do so.

Listed below are a number of basic questions which we believe should be explored further:

-- How long will stocks of POL and other essential materiel last and when will consumption plus losses force major cutbacks in activity levels?

-- How much POL can the North Vietnamese bring in by

TOP SECRET

- 7 -

of the average annual rate of 400,000 tons (1st qtr 1972 rate = 600,000 tons/yr.). Can they support the 120,000 ton average annual military usage by rationing other sectors?

- Would such imports materially affect their ability to sustain high activity level in the South? How effective would our interdiction be?
- With the lower level of tank activity in the South, is the POL requirement substantially less? To what degree has this been offset by increased truck operation required by interdiction of rail lines?
- Can we expect to see armor used as it was at the beginning of the offensive? Have the losses been so great as to rule this out? Or have they been able to replace losses in the South?
- What is the truck inventory situation? Are increased demands for truck transport supportable?
- How much has the combat effectiveness of the main force units been hurt by personnel losses -- particularly NCO and officer losses? How do we assess the quality of replacement personnel and how will this affect combat effectiveness of particular units?
- What units are now ineffective? What percentage of the force? How long will it take to put them in good fighting condition? A unit-by-unit assessment is needed.
- What effects will weather have on NVA ability to use armor and artillery and on its ability to move heavy supplies (e.g., ammunition and fuel) in the battle areas (by MR)?

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

*Discussed in
WSAG meeting*

TOP SECRET

MEMORANDUM FOR

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

SUBJECT: CIA Assessment of NVA Military Capability

The CIA Intelligence Memorandum of 8 June -- "The Effect of the Past Month's Events on North Vietnamese Military Capabilities" -- is a most useful study. A reading of it, however, stimulates further questions.

I realize that much of the available data is soft and that hard conclusions are difficult to draw from them. In an effort to get as clear a focus as possible, however, I would appreciate it if our data could be examined again and questions such as the following addressed.

-- POL

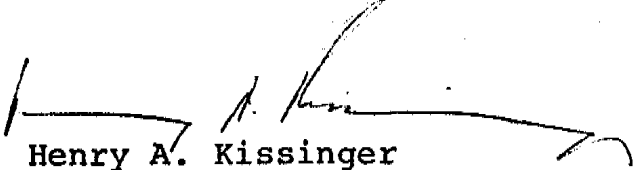
- How long will POL stocks last and when do you estimate consumption plus losses will force major cut backs in activity levels?
- Can the North Vietnamese import a substantial part of the average annual rate of 400,000 tons (first quarter of 1972 would stretch out to 600,000 tons per year)?
 - How much by truck?
 - How much by the pipeline under construction?
- Would the amount of POL that you estimate the North Vietnamese will be able to import materially affect North Vietnamese ability to sustain high activity level in the South?
- How effective would our interdiction be against the estimated imports?

TOP SECRET

TOP SECRET

- 2 -

- With the lower level of tank activity in the South, is the North Vietnamese POL requirement substantially less? and
- To what degree has the diminished tank POL consumption been offset by increased truck operation required as a result of interdicted rail lines?
- Armor and Artillery
 - Can we expect to see armor used as it was at the beginning of the offensive? Have losses of tanks and skilled personnel been so great as to rule this out? or
 - Have the North Vietnamese been able to replace losses in the South?
 - What effects will weather have on the North Vietnamese ability to use armor and artillery and on its ability to move heavy supplies (e.g., ammunition and fuel)?
- Trucks
 - What is the North Vietnamese truck inventory?
 - Are North Vietnamese increased demands for truck transport supportable?
- Combat effectiveness of Main Forces
 - How much has combat effectiveness of the main force units been hurt by personnel losses, particularly NCO and officer losses? How do we assess the quality of replacement personnel and how will this affect combat effectiveness of particular units?
 - What North Vietnamese units are now ineffective? What percentage of the force?
 - How long will it take to put these units in good fighting condition? [It would be most helpful to have a unit-by-unit assessment in response to the questions on combat effectiveness.]


Henry A. Kissinger